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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 001101

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CEN
CABLE HAS BEEN CLEARED BY A/S TOM SHANNON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/03/2019

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SUBJECT: TFH01: WHA A/S SHANNON'S OCTOBER 28 MEETING WITH
PRESIDENT MANUEL ZELAYA

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens for reason 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: A/S Shannon, accompanied by WHA PDAS Craig Kelly, NSC's Dan Restrepo and the Ambassador, held a frank, open exchange of views on the current state of negotiations in Honduras with deposed President Zelaya at the Brazilian Embassy in Tegucigalpa October 28. A/S Shannon emphasized that his visit was a final push to encourage the two sides to reach an agreement before the elections, and encouraged Zelaya to direct his commission to return to negotiations. He acknowledged the lack of confidence Zelaya's team had in the Micheletti regime, but assured Zelaya that the U.S. was prepared to provide guarantees to ensure transparent and effective implementation of an accord. Zelaya reiterated his willingness to accept an agreement with numerous limitations on him, as long as he was allowed to return to the presidency. He condemned the de facto regime's violations of human rights and press freedoms, and its harassment of him and his supporters at the Brazilian Embassy. He believed that Micheletti was betting on the elections to "cleanse" his actions since June 28, but said the de facto President was fooling himself: any elections without his return beforehand would be fraudulent and not recognized by a large part of the Honduran population or by the international community. He urged the U.S. to freeze de facto regime accounts as a means of further pressure, and noted that the prestige of the U.S. was riding on the success of the efforts to restore democracy. In a private pull-aside with A/S Shannon and the Ambassador, Zelaya agreed that if necessary, he would accept a return to office after the elections. End Summary.

¶2. (C) President Zelaya, who was accompanied by the First Lady and several advisors, opened the meeting, warmly welcoming the delegation, and thanking the U.S. for its steadfast position in support of democracy in Honduras. He complained of the repressive actions taken by the de facto regime, characterizing them as an exaggerated reaction to his presence in the country, given what he described as his "quiet" stance since his return. On the negotiations, he reiterated his publicly stated mistrust of the de facto regime's intentions. Micheletti was, he believed, trying to portray Zelaya as playing games with the talks as a means of continuously postponing an agreement until the elections took place. Zelaya noted, however, that he had agreed to every point proposed in the San Jose Accord and the Guaymuras Dialogue. He had abandoned his constitutional assembly plan, supported a national unity cabinet, and agreed to a transfer of control of the armed forces to the National Elections Tribunal (TSE). All he insisted upon was the return to

office of the democratically elected President, yet the de facto regime had claimed he was undemocratic.

13. (C) As for the elections, without an agreement, they would have no validity, Zelaya said. He claimed that two of the presidential candidates were withdrawing from the race (Note: Zelaya likely referred to left-wing candidates Cesar Ham from the Union Democratica and independent Carlos H. Reyes. Neither has publicly stated he was withdrawing as of October 28. End Note.). Similarly, thirty per cent of the Liberal Party candidates for Congress intended to withdraw if he is not reinstated, as would smaller party candidates. In an atmosphere of repressed press freedom and limited freedom to assemble, with the democratically elected President trapped in a foreign embassy surrounded by the armed forces, the international community could not accept the elections as free and fair. The National Party, historically tied to military coups in Honduras, would win, but the Honduran people would reject the new government. Zelaya said his return was the only exit from the trap for Micheletti, the country, and for the region, which would be roiled by further coups if this one were allowed to stand.

14. (C) Zelaya pushed for further measures against the de facto regime to get them to agree to his reinstatement. Specifically, he asked that their bank accounts be frozen. He believed that right-wing elements in the United States were funneling money to support the de facto regime, and only cutting the money off would give the regime a sense of urgency to come to an agreement. The prestige of the United States, the U.N. and the OAS were at stake, so tough steps needed to be taken.

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15. (C) A/S Shannon said he had sensed there was still an interest in dialogue by both sides' negotiating teams, though he understood the Zelaya side's lack of trust in Micheletti's good faith following the de facto president's public statements discarding restitution as a point of negotiation. The delegation was sent to Honduras by the Secretary to make a final strong push for both sides to overcome the last hurdles to an agreement. The elections were an exit to the crisis, but not alone the solution. As the Secretary had told Micheletti in a recent phone call, there were two possible paths Honduras could take. One would be holding elections without international support and recognition, which would lead to a future of continued isolation. The other, supported by the United States, was an accord followed by internationally observed and supported elections and a return to the international fold. Time was short, so both sides needed to move quickly. A/S Shannon said he would be bringing the same strong message to Micheletti at a meeting to follow.

16. (C) Zelaya said he would return to talks but only if Micheletti's side agreed to restitution beforehand. The negotiations should concern the nuts and bolts of how to implement his return. Going back to talks without reinstatement as a given would be "absurd," and would, in essence, mean A/S Shannon's delegation would be returning empty-handed. Zelaya said he understood that his return would be a symbolic one in many ways. He accepted that he might be asked to travel around the world helping to re-build international support for Honduras, but would only do so as the legitimate President of the country. Zelaya said they could cross that bridge when they came to it; the point now was to get Micheletti to agree to talk about the mechanics of his restitution. On the subject of political amnesty, discarded by both sides in the recent negotiations, Zelaya agreed with the delegation that it could be re-included to provide legal protection for the Honduran armed forces, which were most exposed by their actions on June 28.

17. (C) In a pull-aside without advisors following the full meeting, Zelaya told A/S Shannon and the Ambassador that he

could accept a return to office following the elections. He envisioned a scenario in which Congress fashioned a "restoration law" to prohibit the President from participating in any political activities, and required him to travel outside of Honduras to rebuild international support for the country and return to assume the presidency some time after the elections.

LLORENS